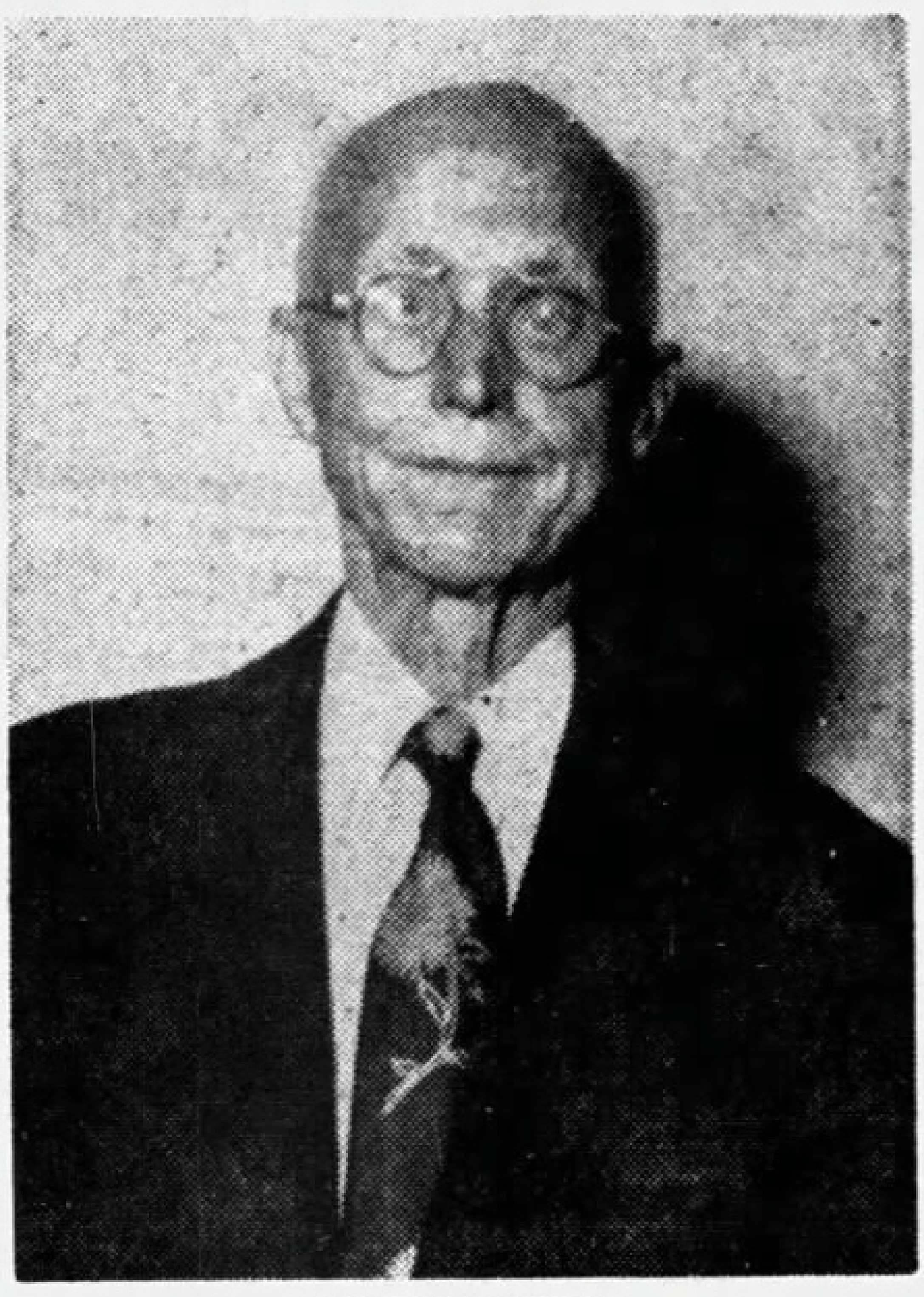
LYMAN BAKER
The Bard of Bannerville

By ALBERT F. BUFFINGTON

ABOUT one mile southeast of the village of Bannerville in Snyder County lives a man who can probably claim the distinction of being Pennsylvania's most prolific bilingual poet. During the past twenty years, this man, who never got beyond the "Third Reader" in school, has written several hundred poems in English and Pennsylvania German.



LYMAN BAKER

Lyman Baker or "The Bard of Bannerville," as the **McClure Plain Dealer**, the local weekly newspaper, refers to this man, was born on June 12, 1875, in West Beaver Township in Snyder County, about a half a mile from his present home, and, except for brief periods when he lived in Lewistown, Bloomsburg and Sunbury, while working as a carpenter for the railroad, has spent most of his life in this part of Snyder County.

When asked about his educational background, Lyman Baker replied:

> Lanning hawwich kenni. Awwer ich hab viel Erfaahring ghatt, un seller Weg hawwich mehner gelannt, ass ich hab in der Schul. Wu ich in die Schul gange bin, waar es yuscht der dritt "Reader"; un sell iss all de weider, ass ich kumme bin. Un datt hawwich gans wennich gelannt drin, bikaas ich bin net lang genunk gange.

Lyman Baker, as the following paper will show, underestimates his amount of "Lanning." He may not have learned much in school, but he has certainly accumulated a vast amount of knowledge and good common sense during the 79 years of his life; and he seems to have been endowed with the ability to make rhymes. In speaking of her husband, Mrs. Baker said, "Lymann can't write anything unless it rimes;" and the several hundred poems he has written during the past twenty years offer abundant proof to substantiate Mrs. Baker's assertion.

"The Bard of Bannerville's" muse has a great deal of versatility. His English poems deal with a large variety of subjects, e.g. nature, politics, religion, "the good old days," rural festivals and celebrations, holidays, seasons, the short-comings of the present generation, and the toils, pleasures and sorrows of the Pennsylvania German farmer. The following partial list of titles reveals the wide extent of the subject matter treated in his poems:

> AFTER ELECTION: WHITHER ARE WE GOING?; THE OLD SCHOOL HOUSE ON THE HILL; GIVE PRAISE TO THE GOD OF THE UNIVERSE; PENNSYLVANIA, THE BEAUTIFUL; WE SHOULD BE THANKFUL; THE BUMBLE BEE; THE NEGLECTED MAN; PLANNING; APHIDS; OLD FOLKS; A FRIEND PASSES; AFFLICTED; IS WAR HELL?; THE CHURCH; OF THE THUNDER SHOWER; THANKSGIVING DAY; HEART AND SOUL FOR PEACE; BROAD IS THE WAY; IN NOAH'S TIME; THE NEW YEAR; THE BIBLE; STANDARD TIME; THE ROBIN; SEPTEMBER; A TREE; DEPRESSION; MARCH; FISHING; RELIGION, BUSINESS AND POLITICS; FEBRUARY; A LOVELY JUNE; WINTER, THEN SPRING; THE RISING SUN; SEPTEMBER; THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES; JANUARY; SWEET HOUR OF PRAYER; WHEN WILL SPRING BEGIN; WORMS, BUGS AND INSECTS; BROWN OCTOBER; SOME SKUNKS; HEARSAY; ROASTING CHESTNUTS; THE COUNTRY STORE; APRIL; SNOW IN MAY; THE BEAN BEETLE; THE NEW PREACHER; MUSIC OF THE BIRDS; PESTS IN AUGUST; THE WIND; NOVEMBER; AFTER THANKSGIVING; THE PHOEBE; MY PENNSYLBANIA; BLUEBERRIES; THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM.

All of the above poems have appeared in **The McClure Plain Dealer**, McClure, Pa., and in **The Lewistown Sentinel**, Lewistown, Pa.

One Sunday afternoon last year, in speaking with "the Bard of Bannerville" about his poetical activities, I asked him how he happened to start writing these poems, and here, in his own words, just as I recorded them on my tape recorder, is his interesting answer:

> Moll ee Daag waar ich im Gaarde un hab hatt gschafft; ich hab gschwitzt. Dann hawwich an ebbes gedenkt, un des iss mer in die Meind kumme. Dann hawwich gedenkt, des dutt mer gut fer wennich schtoppe un abkiehle, unu ich bin ins Haus kumme un hab zu der Fraa gsaat; "Grick Babier un en Pensil."—Sie hot gsaat: "Was widdu?"—"Wei," hawwich gsaat, "ich hab en Schtick, ass ich gaern hett, ass du schreiwe deetscht."—"Wu hoscht du's?" froogt sie.—"Wei," hawwich gsaat, "im Kopp."—Dann hot sie sich hieghockt un hot der Pensil genumme un Babier, un noh hawwich aafange des ablese. Noh hot sie gsaat: "Nau schtopp, net so schtarrig; ich kann's net nunner duh."—Dann hawwich's wennich schlooer nemme misse, un sie hot's nunnergschriwwe. Dann waar es vier odder sex Vaerscht, ass ich yuscht so re gsaat hab, ass sie schreiwe sett, un sie hot. Un sell waar der Schtaert.

I was also interested in finding out where Lyman Baker got the ideas for his many poems, and here is his answer to this question:

> Viel vun denne Eidie-es grie ich, wann ich draus bin in der Nadur. Oh, siss nix, ass ich liewer duh, ass wie mit der Nadur schaffe. Noh, alsemol, wann ich Veggel heer singe, noh kummt mer ebbes in der Kopp. Noh, alsemol daer Weg: Wann ich arriyeds bin un schwetz zu Nochbere odder annre Leit, noh saagge sie als zu mir: "Was denkscht du vun denne Zeide, wu mer hen? Iss es net wunderbaar, die Zeide, was mer hen?" Noh dipend's was fer Sobbtscheckt, ass sie blaudere devun. Sell gebt mer noh en Eidie-e, un noh schteckt des ewwe in meim Kopp. Noh fer's loswarre, muss ich mich ewwe hiehocke un en Pensil nemme un schreiwe. Noh wann's verbei iss, fiehl ich allrecht.

Students of the Pennsylvania German dialect and folklore will regret that the majority of Lyman Baker's poems are written in English rather than in Pennsylvania German, particularly since the Pennsylvania German poems he has written have enjoyed such great popularity among the Pennsylvania German people of Snyder County. Baker chose to write most of his poems in English rather than in Pennsylvania German for the following reasons: 1. there were no orthographic problems connected with the writing of the poems in English; 2. since his poems were published in **The Lewistown Sentinel** as well as in **The McClure Plain Dealer**, they could be read and appreciated by more people if they were written in English. A large majority of the readers of **The Lewistown Sentinel** would not have been able to read and understand the poems if they had been written in Pennsylvania German.

Lyman Baker wrote his first Pennsylvania German poem for the annual McClure Bean Soup Celebration. The latter is an interesting Snyder County folk festival which had its beginnings sixt-two years ago. When the Capt. Michael Smith G. A. R. Post held its first reunion and encampment after the Civil War, bean soup was made and served to the men of the Post and their families and friends as the main dish. This bean soup, which, incidentally, was made by Lyman Baker's uncle, was so well liked, I have been told, that immediate plans were made to have another "Bean Soup Celebration" in the following year. And thus the "McClure Bean Soup Celebration" has been held every year since then and has grown into one of the largest folk festivals of Central Pennsylvania. At the "Celebration" last year sixty-eight large iron kettles of bean soup were made and served, and on one of the days of the three-day "celebration" 30,000 people were in attendance.

It was for one of these annual McClure Bean Soup Celebrations that "the Bard of Bannerville" wrote the following poem to be sung to the tune of "My Country 'Tis of Thee:"—

(Lyman Baker has used the non-phonetic English alphabet in transcribing the sounds of the dialect, and thus it is difficult for the average reader to determine in many cases what word Baker is trying to represent. I have therefore transcribed all of his Pennsylvania German poems according to the system of orthography used in Buffington and Barba's **Pennsylvania German Grammar**, Allentown, 1954).

MEI LAND ICH SING VUN DIR

1. Die Buhnesupp iss do,
   Un alle Mensch iss froh,
   Do in McClure.
   Es iss voll scheene Meed;
   Do watt's eem net verleed,
   Wann eens des Deitsch verschteht,
   Do in McClure.

2. Die Buhnesupp iss fett;
   Deel saagge sie waer net;
   Nau, well iss so?
   Net weit bis an die Schpring,
   Die hot viel Wasser drin,
   Die macht viel Sache dinn,
   Iss des net so?

3. Vun do noch Baltimore,
   So waar's am letschde Yaahr,
   Viel Leit sin do;
   Die sin all an die Wacht,
   Des geht bis nooch Halbnacht
   Mit alle Sadde Yacht;
   Des heert mer do.

4. Die Raawer sin net do,
   Die grooss Land iss aa froh,
   Net yuscht McClure.
   Daer Hitler mit seim Grieg,
   Es iss uns yuscht so lieb;
   Er iss en alder Dieb,
   Des sin mir schur.

5. Fer ee Ding sin mer froh,
   Die Wunnernaas waar do,
   Ken Hitler Mann.
   Daer hot viel besser Glick,
   Uffem Radio iss er schlick,
   Er gebt uns als en Schtick,
   Wie ich net kann.

It is sad to relate, that when the above song was sung at the McClure Bean Soup Celebration, the name of Lyman Baker, the author of the song, was not mentioned. Indeed, a local schoolteacher who led the singing gave the impression that he had written the words of the song himself.

Probably one of the most popular of Lyman Baker's Pennsylvania German poems is his translation of "Aunt Dinah's Quilting Party." Unfortunately, however, very few of the thousands of people who have sung this Pennsylvania German translation in the past ten years know who made it. About eleven years ago Lyman Baker attended the annual Pennsylvania Dutch Versammling at Selinsgrove. Apparently, he was rather disappointed that they sang so many English songs at the Versammling, and when he got home, he decided to translate into the dialect one of the English songs they had sung. Shortly thereafter, this translation fell into the hands of the program committee of the Selinsgrove Versammling, and every year since then Lyman Baker's "Ich bin mit der Nellie Heem" has appeared in the Versammling program without the author's name. The sense of literary ownership among many Pennsylvania Germans is, unfortunately, not very highly developed, and, as Ralph Wood observes, "anything written in Pennsylvania German dialect quickly loses its identity as the creation of one man and soon becomes the common property of all who have had a chance to copy the poem either from manuscript or from the printed page." (Cf. Ralph C. Wood, "Life, Death, and Poetry as Seen by the Pennsylvania Dutch, **"Monatshefte fuer deutschen Unterricht** XXXVII (November, 1945), 459.)

ICH BIN MIT DER NELLIE HEEM

1. Drowwe, wu die Schtanne glitzere,
   Scheint der Mun yuscht net so pleen;
   Es waar vun Aunt Dinah's Gwillding Paerdi,
   Ich bin mit der Nellie heem.

Chorus: Ich bin mit der Nellie heem,
Ich bin mit der Nellie heem;
Es waar vun Aunt Dinah's Gwillding Paerdi,
Ich bin mit der Nellie heem.

2. Uff meim Aarem die weech Hand ruhet,
   Ruhet leicht wie Schaum, ich sehn;
   Es waar vun Aunt Dinah's Gwillding Paerdi,
   Ich bin mit der Nellie heem.

Chorus:

3. Wann ich schwetz, mei Lefze ziddre,
   Iwwer wennich kummt's mer pleen;
   Es waar vun Aunt Dinah's Gwillding Paerdi,
   Ich bin mit der Nellie heem.

Chorus:

4. Wann mer lewe, geht's uns besser,
   Saagt sie ya, ich glaab es Seem;
   Es waar vun Aunt Dinah's Gwillding Paerdi,
   Ich bin mit der Nellie heem.

Chorus:

To be Concluded

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CONCLUSION

About fifteen years ago Lyman Baker wrote the following Pennsylvania German poem which was printed and reprinted several times in **The McClure Plain Dealer** and **The Lewistown Sentinel**:

DIE PENNSYLVANIA BAUER

1. Die Pennsylvania Bauer sin
So schmaerde Leit ass lewe.
Wann die moll in de Bisness sin,
Sie wisse wie's zu hewe.

2. Sie schpiele net, sie schaffe hatt,
Sie wisse wie zu plenne;
Die Weibsleit sin net alsfatt fatt,
Sie duhne Sache kenne.

3. Des kammer sehne uff em Disch,
Wann eens hiegeht fer esse;
Siss alles gut, was dadde iss,
Sie hen aa nix vergesse.

4. Sie nemme Mehl un backe Brot,
Sie mache gude Kuche;
Noh Finnt mer sie net in der Not,
Wann eens hiegeht fer bsuche.

5. Sie schaffe sex Daag in re Woch,
Sie hocke net un ruhe.
Die Weibsleit sin all gude Koch,
Die Mannsleit duhne's Bluugge.

6. Sie gehne Sunndaags noch der Karrich,
Sie helfe gude Sache;
Sie duhne's gaern, sie sin net reich,
Doch kenne sie mitmache.

7. Do saage deel, die Leit sin dumm,
Sie kumme vun de Hiwwle,
Doch lewe si en gans Yaahr rumm,
Sie duhne's net mit griwwle.

8. Die dumme finnscht du in der Schtadt,
Wu alles geht fer lewe.
Die esse viel, doch sin sie matt,
Sie kenne ken Geld hewe.

9. Die schaffe fimf Daag in re Woch,
Noh sin sie am Rumschpringe.
Kens vun de Weibsleit iss en Koch,
Der Schtor muss alles bringe.

10. Des kammer sehne uff em Disch;
Sie hen ken Zeit fer koche.
Die hocke hie un esse Fisch
Mitsammt der Haut un Gnoche.

11. Die gehne Sunndaags noch der Karrich,
Sie helfe gude Sache.
Sie losse aa sie waere reich;
Sie wolle all mitmache.

12. Es waar net so in alder Zeit,
Doch sin noch deel ass schaffe,
Yuscht des sin net die Schteddelleit,
Ass uns en Lewe mache.

13. Fer des saaich, die Bauer sin
So schmaerde Leit ass Lewe.
Wann sie moll ebbes gudes hen,
Sie wisse wie's zu hewe.

Some years ago Lyman Baker read an article in **The Lewistown Sentinel** in which the author of the article minimized the achievements of George Washington. "The Bard of Bannerville" was so incensed by this article, that he decided to write the following poem:

DER GEORGE WASHINGDON

1. Do waar en Bu wie annre sin;
Er waar net vun der Schtadt.
Des iss der George mer hen im Sinn,
Er hot en Haetschett ghatt.

2. Er hackt en gleener Kasche um;
Dann geht er in des Haus.
Als ball dann kummt sei Daadi rum,
Un ruft der George moll raus.

3. "Was iss do letz? Daer Baam iss um;
Daer waar mir lieb wie Geld."
"Des waar mich, un wann Schleeg kummt,
Ich lieg net fer die Welt."

4. Sei Daadi braucht aa net die Fitz.
Er denkt des gebt en Mann;
Moll ee Daag hockt er uff en Sitz,
Un schprecht wie niemand kann.

5. Des waar daer Bu, er leebt noch heit.
Sei Geischt iss um uns rum;
Sei Seel die leebt in Ewichkeit,
In sellem waar er net dumm.

6. So loss uns alle saagge heit:
"Unser Vadder geb uns Mann
Zu fiehre uns in daere Zeit
Wie daer George Washingdon."

The following poem, written during the "depression," reveals that Lyman Baker had little sympathy for those people who were continually complaining about hard times:

HADDE ZEIDE

1. Sie schwetze vun hadde Zeide,
Un saage die Bissniss waer schlecht.
Deel hen meh Geld wie annre,
Un sell waer gaar net recht.

2. Es gebt immer hadde Zeide,
Es hot immer aarme Leit.
Deel hen meh Geld ghatt wie annre
Fer Yaahre yuscht wie heit.

3. Die Ursach brauch mer net suche;
Mer lest sie uff yeder Hand.
Es iss weil die Mensche vergesse
Zu brauche ihre Verschtand.

4. Sie vergesse zu hause un schpaare,
Wann die Arrewet iss blendi un gut;
Noh hen sie nix im Alder,
Ken Geld un aa ken Mut.

5. Die Uumennse un die Ieme,
Die Schkwarrls un anner Vieh,
Die sammle im Summer ihr Fudder
Fer Winder—Watsch mol sie!

6. En Hund vergraabt sei Gnoche,
Un der Mensch iss zu gscheit
Zu sarriye fer die Zukunft
Un schpaare fer darre Zeit.

Lyman Baker got the idea for the following poem, to be sung to the tune of "Tramp, Tramp, Tramp," from a remark made one day by his cousin, who said, "mer kann die Helft vun de Liegge net glaawe, ass mer lest in der Zeiding."

WAS GEBT'S BALL MOLL MIT DE LEIT?

1. Was gebt's ball moll mit de Leit?
Geschder waar's net gans wie heit,
Yuscht mer meent es watt als schlimmer alle Yaahr;
Des Gebabbel, was aageht,
Macht eem Koppweh un verleed,
Yuscht die Helft vun denne Liegge sin net waahr.

Chorus:
Ich wees yuscht net was zu denke,
Vun de Liegge wu mer heert;
Un verleicht bin ich so schlimm,
Wie die wu am Liegge sin,
Yuscht en Lingner grickt sei Geld un iss aa schmaert.

2. Denk mol an die Becker heit.
Wie mer heert, sin die net gscheit,
Yuscht es kummt vun denne, wu ken Becker sin.
Wann mer liegt bis in der Dod,
En gut Ding, noh nemmt's ken Brot,
Yuscht verleicht in heessi Bissniss sin mer drin.

Chorus:

3. Wann mer in die Zeiding guckt,
Lest mer was der Drucker druckt,
Yuscht mer weess net soll mer's glaawe odder net.
Des Babier des hebt eem schtill,
Er kann drucke was er will,
Yuscht waer's besser, wann mer's net gelese hett.

Chorus:

4. Nemm die Parre, die sin drin,
Yuscht deel sin net gans so schlimm;
Doch mer meent es watt als schlimmer alle Yaahr.
Mit Gedanke uff em Geld,
Denke sie net an die Welt,
Un sie liegge, wann sie saagge siss net waahr.

Chorus:

5. Wann der Drucker des nau druckt,
Nemmt sei Zeit dezu un guckt,
Dann verleicht saagt er, "fer was bin ich do drin?"
Des iss Gschpass, nau wa net bees;
Wann du duscht, dann wascht du hees,
Noh verleicht muss ich der saagge, wu ich bin.

Chorus:

The following "Deitsch A, B, C" was written by Lyman Baker after he had heard Henry Rine recite Harvey Miller's (Solly Hulsbuck's) "Der Deitsch A—B—C" at a meeting of the local Grange about eighteen years ago. There is very little similarity, however, between Baker's version and Harvey Miller's.

DES A, B, C

A schteht fer Esel
En Halbbruder zum Gaul.
B schteht fer Brotwascht,
Die schtoppt mer ins Maul.
C schteht fer "Candy,"
Des fresst alle Hund;
D schteht fer Duwack,
Daer macht niemand gsund.
E schteht fer esse,
Des dutt alle Mensch.
F schteht fer fresse,
Deel nemme en "Chance."
G schteht fer Geld,
Des gleiche die Parre.
H schteht fer Haahne,
Die fechde wie Narre.
I schteht fer Issac,
Des waar moll en Bu;
J schteht fer Jacob,
Des waar dem sei Suh,
K schteht fer Kessel,
Do brauch mer ken Offe;
L schteht fer Lattwarrick,
Dann kann mer drin koche.
M schteht fer Mann,
Es hot noch deel heit.
N schteht fer Narre,
Die sin net gans gscheit.
O schteht fer Alde,
Siss voll in der Welt.
P schteht fer Pannhaas,
Daer koscht net viel Geld,
Q..schteht fer "Question,"
Un deel sin aa hatt.
R schteht fer ruhich,
Mer sin ball moll datt.
S schteht fer Schteddel,
Mer kumme aa hie;
T schteht fer Tilly,
Noh sehne mer sie.
U schteht fer Unruh,
Siss latts devun heit.
V..schteht fer wennich,
Dann iss net viel Zeit.
W schteht fer Wexel,
Mer weess haerli wie;
X..schteht fer Exschpenses,
Doch kummt's net gans hie.
Y..schteht fer yeders,
Deel hen en grooss Maul;
Z..schteht fer Zebra,
En schtreeficher Gaul.
& schteht fer gans drumrum;
Was bin ich so froh.
Des dutt's bis ich widder kumm,
Wann bin ich noch do.

My first meeting with "the Bard of Bannerville" occurred in the summer of 1952, when I visited him at his home one Sunday afternoon after my weekly Pennsylvania German broadcast over WKOK, Sunbury. Always on the alert for people who know Pennsylvania German folksongs, poems, rhymes and anecdotes, I had been told that Lyman Baker knew some Pennsylvania German spirituals and that he had written a number of Pennsylvania German poems.

My visit with "the Bard of Bannerville" was a most interesting and profitable one. He sang a dozen or more beautiful Pennsylvania German spirituals in his rich baritone voice and recited his Pennsylvania German poems, all of which I recorded on my tape recorder. In honor of the Nixnutz's (my radio name) visit Lyman Baker wrote the following poem:

DER NIXNUTZ

1. Dem letschde Sunndaag waer waar do
Nooch Sunndaagschul un Esse?
Des waar der Nixnutz—ich bin froh;
Den kann ich net vergesse.

2. Doch iss er en Mensch wie annre Leit,
Wann's net waer fer Professer.
Daer glaabt noch an Gerechtichkeit,
Un sell macht's als noch besser.

3. Daer sucht die deitsche Lieder uff;
Er hot uns gfroogt fer singe.
Die Teep-meschien die neemt des uff;
Die dutt er mit sich bringe.

4. Darrich des hawwich en guder Freind;
Den kann ich net vergesse.
Daer fecht mit Leib un Seel der Feind;
Er hot aa mit uns gesse.

Lyman Baker's poems, it must be admitted, are full of disturbing "fillers" and can of course not compare in quality with those of our more "learned" Pennsylvania German poets. Such a comparison, however, would hardly be fair, in view of Baker's meager educational background. We have felt, nevertheless, that his Pennsylvania German poems deserved to be recorded and preserved, if for no other reason, because of their value for the study of the language and folklore of the Pennsylvania Germans and also because of their great popularity and appeal to the Pennsylvania German people of Snyder County. Even though we who have had the advantages of a higher education may not share in this enthusiasm for Lyman Baker's Pennsylvania German poems, we must, however, recognize the fact that they do form an integral part of our folk literature.